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Father-land: troubled dialogues in a divided island

Dr Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore

The island of Cyprus has been divided since 1963, when inter-communal violence erupted. United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces were called in to secure what came to be known as the Green Line, a de facto cease fire line that separated Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the capital Nicosia. This formed the basis for the demilitarized Buffer Zone that today partitions the island. Following the occupation of the northern third of Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974, the division was formalized and is still monitored by the UN.

The practice research conducted by Kayla Parker and her colleague Stuart Moore at University of the West of England, Bristol, investigates notions of home and (dis)placement in the divided island of Cyprus. Through intertwining subjectivities with political and social histories, the legacies of colonialism, occupation, and the Cold War, the research outcomes will be shared as an essay film, a poetic form of documentary that blurs traditional genre boundaries, being a form of non-fiction that employs fictional techniques.

On receiving the Plymouth-Nicosia Artist Residency Award for *Father-land* in 2016, we spent a month as guests of Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre (NiMAC) in the Republic of Cyprus. Our base in the Turkish Quarter of Old Nicosia was close to the Green Line, the demilitarised Buffer Zone patrolled by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, which separates the Turkish-occupied northern section of the island from the Greek Cypriot south.

During those four weeks of the residency, living and filming near the Buffer Zone became a quiet reflection on the uneasy stasis of the unresolved conflict which tore the island in two over forty years ago. Our families played small parts in the island's past, and the challenge for us seemed to be situating our essay film's narrative in its own buffer zone between a contested history and a placeless personal reflection.

In making sense of our collective past, we drew on our formative experiences of both being 'RAF children', uprooted from one country to another – patriarchal baggage moved by external forces. As the geopolitical cards fell during the latter half of the Twentieth Century, so people were shuffled around and lived with the consequences of exile and displacement. Turkish Cypriots to the north, Greek Cypriots to the south, one child sent to Germany facing the Soviet Union, and the other child part of the troubled status quo in Cyprus.

All along the Buffer Zone there are signs forbidding photography. Aiming a camera towards 'the other side' is not allowed – despite being able to pass through the border crossing points between south and north and traveling to that viewed space. Once there, we are forbidden again from aiming our camera back to see where we have come from.

The large eucalyptus tree we could see from the rooftop outside our apartment has been growing freely in the Buffer Zone for several decades. Wild life thrives in this no man's land, a sanctuary largely untouched by human activity where vegetation overflows the broken, sandbagged buildings and fills the dusty alleys, and sounds pass from one side to the other like the birds and feral animals which have made the zone their home.

As film-makers, we use a dialogic methodology developed through a practice that is collaborative and cooperative rather than predatory – feeding on conflict and drama. We are seeking a truth that is rooted in the fractured ambience of this place. *Father-land* draws on the American film-maker Babette Mangolte's reflexive explorations of landscape and place and the conversational exchange in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* to explore our own histories in this divided island.

We return to Cyprus shortly to film additional sequences and make audio recordings on location to infuse the sound design with appropriate ambience and to inflect the words with the integrity of being and speaking 'in place'. When completed, *Father-land* will be exhibited in the gallery at Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, close to where it was made.



In November 2017 we are invited to join an international group of researchers at University of York to present a paper sharing our insights into the ways in which the screenwriting process comes into play during stages of the essay film's development, using *Father-land* as a case study. The Essay Film and Narrative Techniques: Screenwriting Non-Fiction symposium, convened by the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies, seeks to address the paucity of knowledge in the way essay films are scripted and develop an understanding of the work done in this area.

We are grateful to Professor Liz Wells and the Land/Water and the Visual Arts research group for supporting this project through the Plymouth-Nicosia Artist Residency, and to Yiannis Toumazis, director of Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, and his staff for their generous hospitality and assistance. Thanks also to 3D3 Centre for Doctoral Training for its support of the residency.

Image courtesy of Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore

Underground carpark in Old Nicosia

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